"Half-Breed"

A one-act play.

Theme:

The conflicting forces at work in a half-breed girl, arising from the dual nature of her parentage.

Outline:

1. Opening:

Setting- log cabin in the woods - poorly furnished but clean and neat - curtain reveals the old Indian grandmother, foul-smelling pipe and all - sitting in a corner - girl comes in from a room at back, she has a kind of attractiveness arising more out of intensity within than mere prettiness - she has a flair for color but not much idea of style.

2. Exposition:

Conversation between girl and grandmother must reveal or hint at the family relations - half-breed mother is dead, father is pure Indian, and girls brother has more of the Indian than the white- must hint too, at something of the restlessness of the girl - has had a fair schooling but only openings for her class are in the lines of domestic service - family does not understand her longings for a wider horizon - introduction of young Mountie who has been friendly and probably symbolizes for her much of the life for which she longs-

3. Developement:

Entrance of Mountie - he is not as friendly - girl wonders why and tries to get back on the old footing - M. has come to see father or brother - she finally inveigles him into kissing her violently, she wants to believe that they are in love but he tries to explain that what happened is merely a chemical reaction, that he is as susceptical as most fellows, and that she has been asking for trouble. He likes her, yes, and feels sorry for her because he understands something of her restlessness, but that is all. Father and brother appear - M. announces that he has orders to take them to headquarters for questioning on bootlegging charges.

4. Climax:

Father accuses girl of giving damaging information to M. and strikes her with whip, whereupon M. draws gun and orders him to stop- brother shoots M. from behind, killing him.

5. Ending:

At first girl is bitter toward brother, then when grandmother tells them that men are coming, the danger that her men-folk are in acts upon her will and she becomes one with the hunted. The two men flee - girl cunningly lays evidence that she was the slayer - distant beat of tom-toms is heard, symbolyzing the psychological change taking place in girl's mind - near at hand comes the sound of an approaching party - a knock on the door - the girl waits---.

The Characters:

Rose ---------- half-breed girl
Straun Hendrickson --- Mountie
Wolverine ---------- her father
Joe ---------- her brother
Gran ---------- her grandmother

The Play:

The magic curtain transports you from your particular metropolis to a wind-swept cabin in the north-woods; from today's engrossing social conflicts back a number of years to a time when the struggle for economic security fathered greater struggles in the hearts of men and women. Perhaps the conflict that makes this play has a more fundamental origin, but the fact of poverty in material and opportunity has an undeniable influence.

The room you see cries out, " we are poor, we who live here- our daily theme is the hard one of making our livelihood.' Each piece of furniture tells its own story of tall timber, of axe and saw, and man's handicraft. ~~By a narrow window down left a bench and washstand~~ A heavy,rough-hewn table stands in the middle of the room, one chair keeping it company. At the back, in the centre, a curtained doorway leads to the bedroom, for this is a two-room cabin. On one side of it is a massive cupboard - it might hold a winter's provisions - and on the other, the left side, and forward from the wall, there is a rusty stove. Here is one item not carved out of the forest. By ~~a~~ the outside door down left, a ~~n~~ bench and simple washstand hold no briefs for modern plumbing. They are honest symbols of pioneer homes. There is a narrow window on your right and near the back; and downstage from it is a low couch covered with a good, grey blanket. By the couch there is something oddly out of key with the frugal note of its surroundings - an old,and scarred, but an unquestionably genuine phonograph. Its top is raised as though it were often in use.

Presumably you have taken all this in at a glance, ~~gradually as the action of the play progresses;~~ but now you discover the shadowy figure of a very old woman rocking in a barrel-chair by the window. The snow-white hair; the dark, weather-beaten face, etched with hundreds of tiny lines; a sort of ageless vitality in her quick fingers; - she is working tiny beads into intricate patterns;-all contribute to a universal portrait of old peasant women, whether from the rice-fields of China or our own forest lands. She is smoking a clay pipe, and she might have been the subject of a James Henderson study.

After a moment Rose appears in the doorway from the bedroom. She pauses by the cupboard to glance briefly at the grandmother, and beyond her out of the open window; and then wanders disconsolantly to the chair by the table. She sits down with her back to the door and idly turns over the pages of a catalogue lying on the table. The girl has a kind of attractiveness arising more out of intensity within than mere prettiness . She has a flair for color - her dress is the precise shade of red to accent the tones of an olive skin - but ~~there is not much idea of style.~~ she has shown little aptitude for style.

She speaks tonelessly, as though the hopeless motony of her life was too much to bear on this particulay afternoon.

Rose: Gran - (she does not even bother to look up.)

Gran: Huh.

Rose: When'd Paw say he'd be ~~xxxx~~ back?

Gran: Didn't say.

Rose: Did Joe go with him?

Gran: Reckon he did. (she stops working for a minute and looks keenly at the girl)
You're all spruced up, aint you?
(Rose chooses to ignore this remark)
Maybe you're figering on company comin' , maybe the mountie, eh?

Rose: Shut up! (she slams the catalogue shut to punctuate the remark, and moves petulantly to the stove. She begins to build up the fire.)

Gran: (at her work again) I've got a thing to say to you, girl. You're acting like a headstrong young colt. What business you got fooling around with that policeman? He's not your breed.
(Rose ~~xxxxxxxx~~ does not answer, but there is a deliberate sulleness about her movements, indication that the words are pricking at her anger. She fills a big kettle with water from a pail on the washstand, and sets it on the stove.)
You've got the blood of your mother's people in you, that makes you unhappy and restless. Joe, he's not like that; he's like Wolverine, like me; he's good Indian. You find a good young fellow and get married and you be happy too.

Rose: I know the rest. (she is in front of the table, now, and leaning against it.) Marry, and have kids, and get old and fat - like pigs! (her voice is bitter.) Only pigs don't know better - I do. I've been to school; and touched satin; and seen moving pictures; and heard an organ; and read books. ~~But~~ What good does it do me now?

They said,' even the white girls walk the streets looking for a job.' ~~What chance would I have?~~

Gran: (looking out of the window) He's coming now.

Rose: Paw?

Gran: The mountie.

Rose: Gran, (she speaks quickly, now - a subtle change is in her, she is lithe and full of awareness.) go lie down. You didn't have your nap today ~~anyway~~. Git. (she almost pushes her out of the room with the word.) Gran is muttering under her breath.

(There is a knock at the outside door. The girl turns expectantly.)

Come in. (Straun Hendrickson enters the room, ~~xxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ and stands by the door, looking a little grim. This is not quite what Rose expected. He is clean cut, and tall of course - just somebody's nice youngster.)

Hello Straun.

Hendrickson: Hello Rose. Is your father or Joe around?

Rose: No. They're away.

Hendrickson; Any idea when they'll be back?

Rose: No.

Hendrickson: Okay, I'll come back lator. (He turns to the door.)

Rose: You could wait. They didn't pack eats, they'll be in for supper.

Hendrickson; Well, All right. (He sits down and throws his hat on the table, grinning a ~~little~~ bit sheepishly.) I'm a little hungry myself. I could do with something to eat.

Rose: I'll make you some tea. (She gets bread and cheese, with a knife and plate from the cupboard and sets them on the table; Straun lights a cigarette.) You look friendlier now. When you came in I thought you were going to ~~xxxxxx~~ bite my head off. (She is at the stove, now, making the tea.)

Hendrickson: Hardly. (laughing a little.) I shouldn't let my gloomy thoughts walk all over my face, should I?

Rose: Is there trouble?

Hendrickson: ~~xxxxxxx~~ Trouble is just the trouble with my job. Let's skip it.

(Rose brings a cup of tea, placing it beside him.)

Thanks.

Rose: (leaning on the table) YOU didn't bring me a record ~~today~~ this time.

Hendrickson: Woa back, Scotty - you've got a mighty tall thirst for music. There was a whole stack of discs with the phonograph when I rescued it from Aunt Matilda's attic. I didn't know I was starting a library of ' his master's voice.' By the way do you mind being called Scotty, or are you trying to forget the blood of the McLeish'?

(He has sandwiched all this in between slabs of bread and cheese and sips of tea.)

Rose: It might be better for me if I could. (She has wandered over to the phonograph, and is looking for a record.) Don't they play music while you eat in swell hotels?

Hendrickson: Sure - champagne and 'shymphonies'. They even call your cocktails Clair de Lune or Dance of the Hours. (Rose begins to play'Oh I wish I had some one to love me')

Ugh! That wouldn't glamorize a cup of tea. (She stops the music.)

Turn it over. I think Ramona is on the other side. (She turns the record over and plays 'Ramona'.)

Better and better. In fact that's good enough to dance to. (He grabs a last bite, then gets up to shove the table a little downstage. They begin to dance. Rose has become more assured, more the eternal woman. Straun whistles the tune and Rose smiles at him. This is her moment and she plays the role with instinctive artistry. Her arms steal around his neck, her body clinging; and Straun, like a healthy young animal, grins at the challenge and kisses her with a satisfying vengeance. The kiss is a long one - the phonograph scratches on after the song has ended. Straun is the first to come to. He disengages himself and stops the phonograph. His good-humour has once more given place to grimness.)

Where did you learn to kiss like that?

Rose: I didn't learn, I just knew. You kiss like that when you're in love.

Hendrickson: (He crosses the room and sits on the edge of the table.) Look here, Scotty; what happened just now was a - a chemical reaction. I'm as susceptible as most fellows, and you were asking for trouble. I like you, yes. And I'm sorry for you because - well, because I understand something of your restlessness. But that's all. We don't belong together; you know that.

Rose: (She is by the window, now, half kneeling on the barrel chair.) Why?

Hendrickson: For a number of reasons. And one of them is why I'm here today.

Rose: (She has been looking out of the window, and now she turns suddenly.)
Is it about Paw and Joe?

Hendrickson: That's right; and if you know anything for heavens sake keep quiet. I've been trying to keep you out of it.

Rose: I don't know anything, but I can guess. Why don't you leave them alone? Paw always gets bad breaks, and Joe,-well he - he's never had a chance. Straun,he's only seventeen.(She comes towards him.)

Hendrickson: Hell, I know. I'll do the best I can for both of them, but I don't give the orders, I only obey them.
(The door has opened silently, and Joe and Wolverine have come in. Joe, a strapping young fellow, is hatless, and his black hair is wind-tossed. There is a sulleness about him, the tense insurgence of underpriviledged youth. He walks over by the stove, but does not speak. Wolverine, his father, hangs his battered felt hat on a nail near the door, and turns toward Hendrickson, who has stepped back from the table. The older Indian is more typical of his race - the impassive expression; the bright, child-like eyes; the bronze and wrinkled skin.)

Wolverine: 'Evening,Constable. You got business here? (He speaks tersely)

(Rose walks over to the gramaphone and closes the top. She is pretending indifference, but you know that she is watching every move,catlike.)

Hendrickson: Yeah. I guess you know what about. I've got to take you and Joe back to headquarters tonight for questioning.

Joe: (Breaking in quickly) What about?

Hendrickson: Bootlegging.

(Wolverine has crossed the room swiftly, in front of the table; and Rose turns to meet him.)

Wolverine: (to Rose) You dirty bitch! You sold us, didn't yu'? Sold us to a sneakin' mountie! (He strikes her across the face with a short riding whip. Rose staggers a little and presses the back of her hand to her forhead. Straun has whipped out his gun and levels it on Wolverine.)

Hendrickson: (Spitting out the words,) Drop that whip! (Wolverine drops the whip, then freezes in his position.) Stand back! (He steps back a pace, half turning around.)

Wolverine: You got what you want out of her. (insinuatingly)

Hendrickson: Shut up! (now he speaks deliberately) You're a fool, Wolverine. I could have helped you, but you've made your own indictment. Your damn rotten mind has given you away. (Suddenly he starts to turn, as though he has become aware that Joe has been moving stealthily behind him, to a position well backstage and in the centre.)

Joe. . . . (The command comes too late - Joe has already aimed his gun, and shoots. The expression on Straun's face sets in a sort of startled grimace, then he crumbles slowly. At the sound of the shot, Rose gives an involuntary scream; Wolverine spins around; Gran appears in the doorway, motionless.)

Rose: Oh God! You've killed him. (She starts forward.)

Joe: Stay where you are!

Wolverine: Joe, you crazy fool.This means bad trouble, very bad. (Straun's body has fallen partly behind the table. Wolverine steps over to him, and kneels to feel the pulse. He straightens slowly, shaking his head.) He's dead!

Rose: Get out of here! (~~hysterically~~) Get out, both of you! her words sound sharp edge of hatred, an undercurrent hysteria.

(Gran has stepped forward a bit so that she can see out of the window.)

Gran: Men are coming. (They start a little at the sound of her voice. They had not realized that she was in the room.) Three, four men on horses.

Wolverine: How far?

(Joe has crossed to the window, swiftly.)

Joe: I think it's . . . the Indian agent - (his voice is low, tense, urgent) others probably inspectors or somethin' - They're at the corner - coming this way - might not stop . . .

Wolverine: (He has retrieved his whip, his hat - is now at the door) Joe, come quick. We got time to make the bush.

(Joe pauses on his way out long enough to turn malignantly on Rose)

Joe: If you tell them who did it, so help me God/I'll come back and get you before they get me! (They are gone.)

(Joe's threat has no effect on Rose. At Gran's warning she had frozen into a dark statue. With the realization of imediate danger to her men-folk, her antagonism dissolves - she becomesone with the hunted. The metamorphose, at first slow and groping, now becomes a quick, lightning-like thing. She examines the body hastily, and wrests the gun from the nerveless fingers. Gran has gone back to her chair, and the girl takes the gun to her.)

Rose: Is this gun the same as Joe's?

Gran; Yes.

Rose: The bullets would be the same?

Gran: Just the same.

(Rose throws back the blanket from the couch and fires once into the mattress, then she/lays the blanket back as before. Almost as though the sound was born out of the gun noise, comes the distant beat of tom-toms; at first faintly and barely perceptible, but gradually growing in insistance to the end of the play. She moves to the

centre of the room, the gun in her hand.)

Rose: I did it. Do you hear me Gran? I did it . . . . I loved him - he wouldn't give me a break, that much is true anyway. I shot him from here . . . . Gran, do you hear that sound . . . . the tom-toms . . . . they're laughing, your fathers and grandfathers . . . . Gran, Gran! Do you hear it?

Gran: I hear men in the yard. (There comes the noise close at hand of men's voices and jingle of bridles.)

Rose: Grandpa McLeish - you failed me . . . .

(She turns toward the door, waiting.)

CURTAIN